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NATURE AND CONSTITUTION OF MAN

A Philosophical Treatise on the Nature and Constitution of Man. By George Harris, LL.D., F.S.A. (London : George Bell and Sons, 1877.)

DR. HARRIS has long been known as one of those social scholars who combine with much modern learning a great deal of the learning of the ancients. He is essentially an antiquary in science, and he has obviously collected and brought under ready command a fine array of authorities of various schools of thought and of many centuries. In the two handsome volumes which now lie before us, Dr. Harris has collected a rich store of the historical work of which he is so fond, bearing on the history of man in relation to his life and his physical and mental constitution. The author tells us in the preface that the object of his work is "to afford a comprehensive and complete survey of the nature of man as regards his intelligent being ; to exhibit the direct and immediate connexion of each department in his constitution, with its corresponding relation ; and to demonstrate the uniform mechanism of the whole as one entire and consistent system."

In the first of these volumes we meet with a preliminary dissertation containing "certain collateral considerations and conclusions concerning the nature of man ;" and touching on such details as "the origination and production of animated bodies," "the constitution of animated bodies," "man in relation to both substance and spirit," "essence of spiritual being and the nature of the soul," "operations of spiritual beings," and similar topics. A good way further on in this volume we reach the first "book," which treats on "the medial nature and constitution of man," and which, under the five heads of "sensation, emotion, appetite, passion, and affection," brings the volume to its close.

In the second volume we have first put before us, in "book the second" the subject of "the moral nature and constitution of man." This is discussed under three heads—"moral disposition and character," "the moral desires," "the conscience." Finally, in the same volume we have the third and last book treating on "the mental nature and constitution of man," and embracing under the different subdivisions "the intellectual faculties," "the faculty of understanding," "the faculty of reason," "the faculty of genius," "the memory," "the concurrent operation and reciprocal influence of the various medial, moral, and mental endowments and powers of the soul," and "mental discipline and cultivation."

We have given the outline of these volumes in the order in which they are set forth, because it affords the best account of the matter of the volumes. None but a steady reader will take the trouble to go through so many pages of two closely reasoning volumes on subjects abstruse and confessedly difficult, and we who have steadily gone through them may therefore venture to pilot others on the way.

As we lay down the volumes we find the difficulties of reviewing them very considerable. If we were dealing with the works of a less earnest man than George Harris

we should have no difficulty in finding some faults in every page. If we did not understand, or did not think that we do understand what he means by all the toil he has expended on these two books, we might say that the toil was all labour lost, and that to the making of books there is no end. In a word there is scope in the volumes for the critic of all minds all intelligences and all sentiments. The scholar might question the history, the experimentalist the science, the *littérateur* the style, the metaphysician the metaphysic ; and all, within common rules of criticism, might be severe and at the same time fair.

The truth as it seems to us is that Dr. Harris in the whole of his work has not really endeavoured to set forth any new and original idea of his own absolutely, while yet he has, at the same time, proceeded on an idea which is not destitute of originality. He has striven like a true antiquarian to focus in his own mind the learning of others old and new and best on the subjects upon which he is treating, and then he has tried to plant on his pages his own view as a compound of the complete study. The conception is erudite and laborious to a singular and almost painful labour. It is a work in character with the mental form of a man who has been engaged all his life in judicial pursuits (as by the way is the case with Dr. Harris), and while, therefore, it is free of all fancy, it gives no such indication of individual analysis as shall separate his idea of what he has read from his idea of any one person whom he has read. He tells us, in fact, that "during the progress of the work many hundreds of minds have been dissected by the author," but he does not tell us the further truth, because he is obviously unconscious of the fact, that he has tried to make one dissection out of the whole.

We have said that in the mode of constructing the chapters of these volumes there is an originality in dealing with the accumulated learning of previous authors. Another feature which is quite novel in literature is also introduced by the author. He has laid other living authors under contribution, and whether they agree with him or differ from him he has published their views as he received them, *totidem verbis*. In these cases he has submitted his text, in proof, to the writers whose views he solicited, and having obtained their opinions he has tacked them on to the text in notes. In this manner we have presented to us the views of a number of authorities on many of the most curious and important points in the natural histories of men and animals. Let us give one illustration.

In the chapter on the faculty of understanding in the second volume Dr. Harris discusses or rather considers the question whether inferior animals surpass the human animal in any particular faculty. He reasons that they do and adduces in proof of his opinion "the almost intuitive knowledge which certain animals seem to possess of the virtues of particular herbs, as also of other substances, earths and mineral waters, to which they resort, successfully, in cases of sickness or bodily injury. Their discernment in this respect," he adds, "is probably owing to the great acuteness and perfection of their sensorial organs, which also enable them to detect and avoid poisons."

So much for the opinion of the author himself on this

nice point. But he is not content to let the reader rest on one opinion. He courts the views of nine other authorities who, he thinks, may throw some light on the subject. In this way we get opinions on one point of science rendered by men who are writing purely from their own knowledge without being aware that any one else is adding a word on the topic under consideration, viz., whether inferior animals have any special faculty which man has not. The result is very curious.

Darwin, one of the authorities consulted, doubts the opinion altogether. He knows of no facts making it probable that animals perceive any qualities that are not perceived by us. He does not believe that any animal knows what herbs are poisonous, except through experience during former generations, by which an inherited association or instinct has been acquired against any particular herb. Quatrefages admits the view of the author to a certain extent, and in some cases he believes it to be necessary to admit the intervention of instinct, but he is evidently very doubtful on the subject. Richardson doubts the assertion altogether that animals resort to earths or mineral waters as remedies. He also doubts whether animals avoid poisonous vegetables, except in instances where the substances they refuse are distinctly odorous. He adds that the evidence on the subject in favour of the animal over the man is very small when it is carefully analysed; and certainly in regard to the avoidance of poisons by the inferior animals, the faculty, "as he found by direct observation, is extremely limited." It extends only to the detection of odorous substances. Wallace believes that the statement as made by the author is "unfounded and erroneous." Lubbock doubts whether the word knowledge can be applied to animals, but agrees that their senses are "in some respects more acute; also, perhaps, very different from ours."

These are negative or opposing views to those expressed by Dr. Harris himself on the subject of the special faculties of the inferior animals. But he adds the opinions of other authors which go with his own on the point, and in some instances are more determinately expressed. The late Mr. Alfred Smee, Mr. Serjeant Cox, Dr. Carter Blake, and Mr. Wood are on the side of our author.

We have selected but one example of this incidental inflow of thought from other minds into Mr. Harris's pages. We could have found many more illustrations, some of which are of equal interest, and we have no doubt that in a future day, when all the writers are silent, as, alas! some already are, these footnotes will be quoted—as extracts from letters of past men are quoted now—as evidences of thought quite unpremeditated, but still as correct reflexes of the minds that gave them forth.

We turn to the chapter on "The Faculty of Genius," in the third book as a good illustrative type of the chapters generally. Dr. Harris here strives to fix a definition to the word genius. In accordance with his rule, he gives the definitions of many scholars and metaphysicians respecting genius, and thereupon he adds his own definition. "The faculty of genius," he says, "may be defined to be that power of the mind whereby it is able to produce results which cannot be attained by the common and ordinary faculties for receiving knowledge and reasoning upon it." Genius, therefore, produces results which no exercise of common or ordinary faculties,

however energetically they may be employed, could produce—results which are quite beyond the sphere of such ordinary faculties, "and of a nature altogether different from anything produced by them." "Thus," he continues, "while by understanding and reason we receive ideas and compare them, by genius we are enabled to create them anew altogether, through the original combinations which we accomplish. While the former faculties only enable us to import and to select our wares, the latter enables us to make them ourselves."

From this definition the author proceeds to state that the faculty of genius, like that of understanding and reason, will be found to be constituted of certain independent capacities. These he classifies under different heads, viz., the capacity for wit; the capacity for taste; the capacity of organisation; and the illustration of the nature of these capacities, under the last of which heads there is appended a most interesting note by De Sainte Croix. Further on he writes under other heads, on the distinctive functions, operations and appliances of each of the different capacities of genius; the corresponding characters in the action of each of these capacities; on art as the especial province of the faculty of genius; on the extent and limit of the operations of genius.

Here, in summary, is the scope of this essay of our author on genius. From his point of view, that genius is a special faculty belonging to a particular class of men, it is an admirable treatise in itself. It ought to have been supplemented by a special chapter on genius in relation to families and races, without which chapter it may be considered, by some, to be diffuse, uncemented, and unsymmetrical; an edifice that may easily fall down and is not artistically laid out. For all that it is a commanding construction, wanting in genius but elaborate in labour. It is, in fact, a striking illustration of one of the author's own definitions. The best part of the essay is that in which the attempt is made to prove that the faculty of genius is especially connected with art. It will occur to all who think on this matter that there is in the idea a subject for careful consideration. If it should be true, the admission of its truth would lead to considerable modification in historical appreciations of work in science. It strikes us at once, as we glance back at the history of science, that the true men of genius in science have all been strongly imbued with artistic feeling and knowledge, and it strikes us also that some men who are known only as artists in literature or painting, or other true art, have made very singular and original contributions to science. But the theme is too fruitful of suggestion to be followed out here. We leave it for the study of those who have leisure as well as learning.

We replace Dr. Harris's volumes on our shelves in a convenient place for handy reference, and we commend others who have to think, write, and speak on the subjects submitted for study to do the same. They will often find the matter most useful as well as interesting, and although at times they may wish that the exposition had been less laboured, they will be grateful to an author who has spared neither time, nor labour, nor expense, to give them "the work of his life." We add, without hesitation, that Dr. Harris's work, though it be little read in this age of luxurious reading, will remain to be read as one of the solid and enduring additions to English learned literature.